Course description

This seminar is an introduction to the politics and political economy of development in modern Africa. Topics include the legacies of colonial rule, state formation, state failure and conflict, democratization and democratic erosion, corruption and political accountability, and the role of foreign aid. Readings draw from comparative politics, political economy, history, geography, and development economics. The course puts an emphasis on research design and evaluating causal claims.

Course Aims and Objectives

In this course, we will tackle the big questions of political development, using different examples from Sub-Saharan Africa as our case studies. Particular emphasis is put on governance challenges in modern Africa. We will read a mix of classic theories on African politics, cutting edge research articles, and journalistic accounts.

The goal is to learn about specific cases, develop a nuanced understanding of political development in Africa as well as the promises and pitfalls of proposed solutions, learn practical tools for assessing the effectiveness of different interventions, and to walk away with an appreciation for the complexities of development.

Performance will be evaluated on the basis of comprehension of and critical engagement with the reading materials, active participation in class, and writing.

Course Policies and Expectations

You are expected to have read all required readings before class and to actively engage in classroom discussions. You should come prepared to defend or question arguments presented in the readings. Take notes as you read and bring any questions you have on the readings to class. Clarifying questions as well as well-documented counterarguments – from other classes or readings you have done outside of class – are welcome and encouraged. This being an advanced seminar, regular attendance is non-negotiable. If you have a valid reason to miss a class (with prior excuse) you need to submit a response essay about the material covered in the missed class,
due by the beginning of the following class. This essay will count toward your total submissions of response essays.

Materials and Access

We will read most or all of two books, so you should purchase them:

- Wrong, Michela, 2009. *It’s Our Turn to Eat. The Story of a Kenyan Whistleblower*.

Articles can be accessed through the links on this syllabus from campus and book chapters will be available on Canvas.

Assignments and Grading Procedures

This is a writing intensive class. Grades will be composed of:

- Participation and map quiz: 20%
- Response essays: 20%
- Book report: 25%
- Final paper: 35%

Participation: You are expected to attend all classes and to actively participate in the discussion of the readings.

Map quiz: You will be asked to identify ten countries on a blank map of Africa. Here is a good study tool.

Response essays: The purpose of these essays is to synthesize the week’s readings succinctly and to use them to respond to the question posed each week on the syllabus. Synthesizing large quantities of information and writing concisely is one of the most important skills you can learn in college. Response essays should be no longer than two pages (1-inch margins, 12-point font, double-spaced). Bibliographies can be included on a third page. You can write up to three response essays, the best two will be considered for your grade. Response essays are due by Tuesday night of the relevant week since I may refer to them in class.

Book report: You will write a book report on Michela Wrong’s “It’s Our Turn to Eat”. Book reports should be no longer than 4 pages (1-inch margins, 12-point font, double-spaced). Bibliographies can be included on a fifth page. The report must have an argumentative thesis, which is supported by evidence from the book and secondary sources. Questions for the book report will be posted in advance on the course website.

Final paper: You will write one long research paper, due at the end of the semester. The paper is due in two parts, a two-page outline summarizing your argument and the evidence you plan to present (due November 14), and the final paper (15-20 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins; due TBD). The paper topics will be posted on Canvas.

All written assignments, except for response essays, should be submitted through the course website. Late submissions will be reflected in the grade. Response essays will not be accepted after the beginning of class.
Some tips on writing in the social sciences:

- How to Write an Essay (Blattman)
- Good Writing in Political Science. An Undergraduate's Student's Short Illustrated Primer (Farrell)
- Writing Resources for Government Concentrators (GovWrites)

Collaboration and academic integrity policy

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. After all, one key objective of the course is for you to develop your own arguments and practice your writing and critical thinking. You must adhere to the standard citation practices in Political Science and clearly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, speeches etc. that have helped you with your work. If you receive help with your writing, such as for example feedback on drafts, you must also acknowledge this assistance. For more information and exercises, see the GovWrites website.

Technology policy

Given mounting evidence of the benefits of taking notes by hand and the distraction laptops tend to offer, I encourage you to use pen and paper. While I do not forbid the use of laptops, they should be strictly used for note taking and referencing reading material. Internet should be switched off during class. If laptops prove too much of a distraction I reserve the right to change this policy. Please put your phones on silent and keep them out of reach during class.

Special accommodations

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to make these arrangements by this date may negatively affect our ability to implement the arrangements on time.

A (non-exclusive) list of resources to stay up to date on African politics

- AfricaUpdate
- Al Jazeera Africa
- allAfrica
- An Africanist Perspective
- BBC Africa
- Economist
- Monkey Cage
- New York Times
- Washington Post
Course Schedule

Week 1: September 5. Introduction

Week 2: September 12. Initial conditions

How did pre-colonial political institutions and geography shape today’s political and economic development?


Herbst, Jeffrey, 2000. States and Power in Africa. (Chapter 2, Power and Space in Precolonial Africa) (see link on Canvas Syllabus page)

The Road to Hell is Unpaved. The Economist, 21 December 2002.


Further material:

Adichie, Chimamanda, 2009. The Danger of a Single Story. TED Talk


Week 3: September 19. Legacies of slave trade and colonialism

You can begin submitting response essays.

Through which channels did colonialism and the slave trade weaken modern African states?

Moss, Todd, 2007. African Development. (History and the Legacy of Colonialism, Chapter 2)


Mamdani, Mahmood, 1996. Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of
Late Colonialism. Princeton University Press. (Decentralized Despotism, Chapter 2)

Further reading:


Moss, Todd, 2007. African Development. (The Complexities and Uncertainties of Development, Chapter 1)

Week 4: September 26. Ethnicity

Brief map quiz in class

Through which mechanisms does ethnicity shape modern politics and public goods provision? What are the origins of ethnic cleavages?


Further reading:


Week 5: October 3. State building, taxation, and accountability

Why are many African states weak? What conditions hampered the formation of social contracts between the rulers and the ruled?


**Week 6: October 10. Democracies, dictatorships, and hybrid regimes**

*What factors affect whether (African) countries develop into democracies, autocracies, or hybrid regimes?*

Moss, Todd, 2007. *African Development*. (Political Change and Democratization, Chapter 5)


Further reading:


Week 7: October 17. Democratic consolidation and erosion

Under what conditions do elections promote political accountability?


Do some independent research on the failed coup attempt in Equatorial Guinea in 2004. What happened? Are any important factors omitted in the documentary? What do you think would Binyavanga Wainaina (How to Write About Africa) say about the narrative style of this film?

Further reading:


Week 8: October 24. Patronage and corruption: The Case of Kenya

Book reports due before class

Wrong, Michela, 2009. It’s Our Turn to Eat. The Story of a Kenyan Whistleblower.

Week 9: October 31. Conflict

What are the root causes of conflict on the continent? How have they changed over time?


Roessler, Philip, 2016. Coup-Civil War Trap. Cambridge University Press (Introduction, Chapter 1)


Further reading:


**Week 10: November 7. Foreign Aid**

What are the main arguments of these critics of foreign aid?

Moss, Todd, 2007. *African Development* (The International Aid System, Chapter 8)

Podcast with Binyavanga Wainaina. *The Ethics of Aid: One Kenyan’s Perspective* (or see transcript)


**Week 11: November 14. Research Design: How do we know what works?**

Outline for final paper due

What are the main arguments in favor and against using field experiments to study development interventions?


Dunning, Thad, 2016. *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences: A Design-Based Approach*. Cambridge University Press (*Chapter 1*)


*Further reading:*


*November 21: Thanksgiving recess*

*Week 12: November 28. (How) can governance be improved?*

*Olken and Pande conceptualize accountability problems as principal-agent problems. Which principal-agent problems do they mention? What kinds of interventions have been tested to improve them? What are their potentials and pitfalls?*


*Further reading:*


*Week 13: December 5. Climate change and migration*

*What are the main implications of climate change in Sub-Saharan Africa?*
Climate change

Five ways climate change could affect Africa, BBC News, 11 December 2015


CO2 and other greenhouse gas emissions, Our World in Data

Overview: climate change, World Bank

Migration

The Paradox of Prosperity (Links to an external site.), Foreign Policy 2017 (recommended: see also the other parts of the series)

Climate change and migration


Out of Africa. A National Geographic Documentary by Thomas Friedman (This is a non-academic piece. You may find some claims convincing and others less so.)

A task for everyone: Select one case where environmental changes have affected livelihoods in Africa and be ready to briefly discuss it in class. What environmental changes are taking place? How are they affecting livelihoods? What are the political downstream effects? Are any solutions in sight?

Further reading:


Date TBD: Final papers due